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ABSTRACT

Administrations at colleges and universities are continually faced with the following dilemma: "Just what is our school radio station all about?" To help to answer such questions, this paper focuses upon some of the basic elements contained in formulating, operating, and managing a college or university radio station. The approach presented within the manuscript is that of an administrative guide, and thus is presented as a working document to provide specific facts and knowledge in regard to the station, itself. These attributes could easily be applicable to all electronic media outlets that might be found on campus. (Contains 12 references.) (Author/RS)

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UNDERSTANDING YOUR MEDIA OUTLET: AN ADMINISTRATIVE GUIDE TO THE SCHOOL RADIO STATION

by

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UNDERSTANDING YOUR MEDIA OUTLET: AN ADMINISTRATIVE GUIDE TO THE SCHOOL RADIO STATION

Abstract

Administrations at colleges and universities are continually faced with the following dilemma: "Just what is our school radio station all about?" To help to answer such questions, this paper focuses upon some of the basic elements contained in formulating, operating, and managing a college or university radio station. The approach presented within the manuscript is that of an administrative guide and thus is presented as a working document to provide specific facts and knowledge in regard to the station itself. These attributes could easily be applicable to all electronic media outlets that might be found on campus.

Introduction

The purpose of the any formulation of plans to construct or even consider a media outlet on a college or university campus would be to produce a checklist and recommendations leading to the establishment of the entity itself. This planning would then serve to help suggest a timeline for completion and implementation of those steps and recommendations necessary to commence operations. To that end, this paper attempts to address pertinent issues involved in constructing a campus broadcast radio station, along with basic needs to begin formal operations of the entity. These are presented geared toward the administration of the school itself in order to help understand how and why radio stations on campuses are operated in specific and, quite often, different fashions.

This paper is presented as general in scope, only touching upon some of the areas involved. It is the intent that these elements will serve to introduce the reader to the many facets involved in operating an electronic media outlet, which could be applied to other operations on campus in addition radio, such as television and cable.

Ownership

The radio station, as a broadcasting facility, would be licensed to the school itself. As outlined within the rules and regulations of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), ownership of the station delegates true control of the station itself. While the President of the college or university might designate an individual (i.e., Administrative Vice President, Academic Vice President, etc.) as the signature authority for license applications and other legal documentation for the station, in reality the University Board

of Regents would more likely be listed as the actual "owners" of the station itself. Initially, it is recommended that research be undertaken to determine how other schools within the home state handle their ownership specifications for applications and licensures. Should it be determined that the Board of Regents are listed under the ownership category, then any broadcast interests that individual regents hold might need to be provided within the application in order to clarify any conflict of interest. This matter can further discussed with outside legal consultation, as addressed below.

Furthermore, should the station be licensed to a unit on campus, such as the student government, then interpretation and assignment of the license to a designated applicant will need to be ascertained. Again, counsel should be retained for assistance.

Consultants

In 1982, Krasnow and Bentley wrote the following concerning broadcasting consultants: "Any prospective purchaser – and especially one without management and/or ownership experience in broadcasting – would do well to obtain the services of a consultant or adviser familiar with the complex nature of the broadcast business" (p. 5). While their paper, entitled "BUYING OR BUILDING A BROADCAST STATION: Everything You Want – And Need – To Know, But Didn't Know Who To Ask," was directed toward commercial (for profit) entities, the advise of utilizing the services of a consultant is wise to the noncommercial contender also. Schools should inquire with other campus stations to seek out knowledgeable individuals who could assist in the planning stages. The school should seek flat rates, asking for an "educational discount" if possible, and be specific as to what they want, and what the consultant can provide.

Quite often, if nothing else, the consultant can put the school in contact with the other needed sources, such as broadcast attorneys and engineering firms.

Legal Considerations

From the outset, it is recommended that the school seek out and secure broadcast legal counsel. Professional firms who deal with FCC matters for noncommercial stations are preferred. Initially, legal counsel will assist the college or university in preparing the application for a construction permit. Upon awarding of such a permit, and after construction of the station, initial operation, and technical testing, legal counsel will also assist in the preparation of the application for the station license.

Having legal counsel present at the initial stages of station planning ensures that the applicant is proceeding properly within the process. Legal counsel also can represent the licensee as a direct contact to the FCC. Overall, acquisition of legal counsel at the commencement of the station inquiry process can save a great deal of frustration and money in the long run, along with assuring that proper materials are being produced and filed in a timely fashion.

Depending upon the station structure (see models later in this paper), an individual must be designated as the Chief Operator who will be responsible for the numerous legal matters for station operation. In order to provide the reader with an example of such requirements, materials are cited here that detail FCC broadcast rules, compliance issues, and required station documentation. These items can help serve to illustrate just some of the station requirements for legal operation and are so noted for further research.

- FCC Audio Services Division Radio Broadcast Rules (Part 73) section listings

- FCC FM Broadcast Station Self-Inspection Checklist contents
- The Revised FCC Rules & Policies for the Noncommercial Broadcast Licensee Public Inspection File
- FCC Inspection Fact Sheet
- The New Emergency Alert System (EAS)
- Community Issues Programming Quarterly Issues/Programs List

(Broadcast engineering firms are discussed later with regard to technical issues.)

State Issues

As detailed in Section 73.502 of the FCC Radio Broadcast Rules, state-wide plans are provided. It is recommended that plans be investigated to ensure that the proposed station falls within any state initiatives. According to the Federal Communications Commission:

> In considering the assignment of a channel for a noncommercial educational FM broadcast station, the Commission will take into consideration the extent to which each application meets the requirements of any state-wide plan for noncommercial educational FM broadcast stations filed with the Commission, provided that such plans afford fair treatment to public and private educational institutions, urban and rural, at the primary, secondary, higher, and adult educational levels, and appear otherwise fair and equitable. (Code of Federal Regulations, October 1, 1999, p. 148.)

Location, Structure, and Operation

It is highly endorsed that the proposed radio station, typically noncommercial, be housed and operated under the auspices of an academic department. Traditionally, campus radio stations have served numerous functions (see the later discussion concerning "campus" radio). The following are provided as "objectives" that might be considered for the proposed station (not listed in any particular order):

1) Provide for an industry standards environment in which students can learn about the multi-faceted business of broadcasting.
2) To serve the public interest as mandated by the Federal Communications Commission.
3) To provide information about the school to the community at large.
4) To provide information of interest to the school community.
5) To provide alternative programming not currently available in the listening market.

Furthermore, facilities from which the radio station would operate that are housed within the department (serving as the transmitter control point) could be located separate from the teaching facilities of the department. This would provide for the radio station to establish itself as a self-operating entity within the department, and thus, will not "tie up" classroom/academic studio lab space.

Station Structure

Will Robedee of KRTU-FM at Rice University in Houston conducted an on-line query posted to the Collegiate Broadcasters, Inc. listserv regarding station models. Responses were gathered both on and off the listserv and examples were assembled to

formulate a listing of exhibited college/university structures for radio stations. The following is a synopsis and delineation of the results distributed on November 15, 2000 and puts forth examples of the various structures under which the radio station might be developed and operated.

The Adviser Model.

Here the students run the station and get support and advice from a professional staff or faculty Manager/Adviser. The Manager/Adviser rarely, if ever, makes decisions concerning station operations or policy.

The Student Model.

Students run the show. Usually the students have an advisor, but no real direct supervision is exhibited, except perhaps on paper. The Student Government may have some role on paper or more. This model is usually found in the student affairs area and the station is on its own until it gets in hot water.

The Manager Model.

The paid full time manager is the only full time employee. He or she manages the station in a more traditional commercial radio structure. This person can be faculty or staff.

The Student/Professional Model Version 1.

A team of professionals handles the management of the station, but leave on air operations to students. In this model, there is a lot of mentoring from the professional staff. Management makes the decisions, with input from the student staff.

Student/Professional Model Version 2.

A team of professionals operate the station for a portion of the day and students other portions. Again the professionals are in total control of policies and staff.

Professionals Only.

Seems self evident. Perhaps there are some student interns.

Public Affairs Model.

Similar to the "Professionals Only" model, but this specifies that the station is under the Public Affairs division of the college or university.

Public Radio Model.

Most commonly a National Public Radio (NPR)/Public Radio International (PRI) station with some local programming that could be professional or of student driven local content.

Course Lab Model (Co-Curricular) Version 1.

Station is more or less an extension of the classroom. The faculty determine programming, policies, student managers, etc.

Course Lab Model (Co-Curricular) Version 2.

Station is more or less an extension of the classroom. The students determine programming within well defined guidelines. The guidelines are established by the university or department.

The Incorporated Model.

The station is incorporated. A board of university "people," professionals and students comprise the board and determine policy to govern the station. Students operate the station and handle daily programming and policy decisions.

Campus Radio, Community Responsibility

From the recently published book entitled *The Culture of American College Radio* (Sauls, 2000), the following helps to illustrate the true meaning of a college or university radio station. While often called a "campus" station, the broadcast outlet has the responsibility of additionally serving the "outside" community at large, along with that of the campus. Here, the radio station is compared to that of the traditional print medium on campus.

> ***The Campus Radio Station Versus the Campus Newspaper***
>
> The campus newspaper is just that -- a "campus" outlet. The campus newspaper does not carry the obligations toward [the local] community that the campus radio station carries. Though more "visible" than the radio station, it has no ongoing commitment to the local community, so it can stop printing, for instance, during school break periods. The campus radio station, however, is a federally licensed agent of the school and must meet minimum obligations so as not to jeopardize its continued authorization to operate.
>
> Interestingly, the campus newspaper is often referred to as the "student newspaper," while the campus radio station is referred to as the "school station" (p. 148).

Again, given the operational choice, that of radio, television or cable, the broadcasting entity will be operating within its own realm, while continually compared to other facets on campus.

Technical Issues

Frequency Availability & Acquisition

It is also recommended that the school consult with a Broadcast Engineering firm to seek out available FM frequencies in the market. It will probably be most desirable that a noncommercial FM frequency (88.1-91.9 MHz) be secured. While it is permissible to operate a noncommercial station in the non-reserved (commercial) portion of the FM band (92.1-107.9 MHz), it is less desirable for the following reasons:

1. Channel separation tends to be more stringent in the commercial band.
2. The station might be open to more challenges during the initial acquisition and license renewal periods from commercial interests.
3. For a new commercial station in the market, the applicant would need to petition the FCC to allocate such a frequency, with no guarantee of being granted the license.

(It should be noted that an advantage of securing a commercial frequency is the ability to sell advertising. It is the understanding though that the school would at that point be applying for a true commercial license, as opposed to the noncommercial educational station designation. Further legal advice should be sought if the college or university must consider applying in the commercial portion of the FM band.)

One must note that should more than one applicant apply for the same frequency in the noncommercial portion of the FM band that a mutually exclusive situation could arise that might give rise to comparative issues. The reader is directed to "The New Noncommercial Educational Application Procedure" as produced by Cary S.Tepper of Booth, Freret, Imlay & Tepper, Attorneys at Law. This work provides specifics relating

to the new noncommercial educational application procedure. Furthermore, the FCC has recently changed to a window system for noncommercial applications. While the window for noncommercial applications is currently closed, it is expected to be opened some time in the near future. Here again, legal counsel should be sought for further guidance, if needed.

Tower & Transmitter Site

Along with available frequencies, a major determining factor in the location of the broadcast point (transmitter, tower & antenna) is the tower location. Below, the following options are discussed for both on and off-campus consideration.

On-Campus. On campus a communication tower located on top of a high building, such as a multi-storied dorm is a possible location to mount the station antenna. The advantage to this type of location is that the signal could be sent to the transmitter via wire, and thus not require a studio-to-transmitter link (STL). The true disadvantage is the actual height of the building itself (depending upon the number of stories), which would prove for weaker broadcast range than a taller tower. Also, a mounted communication tower might not be tall enough itself to house an allotment of bays that might be required to achieve the effective radiated power (ERP) of the station depending upon the transmitter output.

Off-Campus Tower Rental Space. Any off-campus location could entail the additional costs of tower rental, charge for housing the transmitter, a studio-to-transmitter link (STL) and micro-wave dish at the tower location, monthly electricity costs at the transmitter site, and antenna installation charges along with associated costs (re-tuning of adjacent antennas housed on the tower). Additionally, an off-campus location will

require that some type of mast be mounted on or constructed close to building on campus housing the originating studio-to-transmitter link (STL) microwave at the station.) A tower owner could be approached as to the possibility of donating space for the campus station utilization.

Self-Ownership. Finally, construction by the school of its own tower is also a consideration. The advantage to such sole proprietorship is that of total control. With tower rental (as noted above), there is always the possibility that the station would have to relocate at any given time (a matter which would require FCC approval). Additionally, the school could lease space on its tower and generate revenue. The responsibilities of tower ownership include property requirements, initial tower costs, and on-going tower maintenance (lighting, painting, structural, etc.).

Finances and Personnel

As with any operation on campus, cost is a factor. Understanding that the campus radio station could operate up to 365 days per year, a commitment by the school is also a necessity. While allocations vary greatly (see Wilson, 2000 for budget examples presented for stations owned by universities in the state of Pennsylvania), an establishment of support is essential. For illustrative purposes, the following discussion is divided into start up costs and annual costs. In addition, personnel issues are addressed.

Start Up Support

As for equipment, a technical engineer or other outside support should be consulted as to estimating the initial main studio equipment cost and associated

transmission needs. While a used transmitter could be acquired (at a greatly reduced price or even donated), it should be noted that maintenance costs of used equipment (particularly tube based units) quite often outpace costs for new, state of the art, solid-state units. A final detailed cost list of all associated start-up items (studio equipment, transmitter, antenna, installation requirements, etc.) would need to be developed and finalized for budget presentation.

In addition, hardware necessary (computer, etc.) and associated programs (software) to receive programming via satellite and broadcast under both live and/or "unattended" computer operated systems should be identified and included in any planning. This would be in addition to and support of the other equipment in the main studio. Additionally, remote equipment should be considered for coverage and presentation of sporting events, concerts, lecturers, etc.

Annual Support

After initial start up, year-to-year budgeting will be needed to operate the station. Below, a "menu" is provided which details anticipated budgetary items. These items have been divided into the categories of Required/Essential and Additional. Also, since projected costs are not provided, all items should be quoted for actual figuring.

Required/Essential

Music Licenses (ASCAP, BMI, SECAC)

Studio Facilities Maintenance

Transmitter Facilities Maintenance

Programming Supplies (recording materials, etc.)

Program/Satellite Distribution Services

Electricity Costs at Transmitter, if applicable

Tower Maintenance, if applicable

Additional

News Wire Services (AP, UPI)

Computer Costs for Wire Services

Audio News Services

Subscriptions and Special Publications

Telephone Monthly Charges (Studio, Remote, Transmitter Site)

Long Distance Phone Charges (including cellular)

Printing & Copying (including Program Guide)

Office Supplies

Postage

Postal Service Box Rental

Travel

Management/Programming

Student Participation (Sports/Broadcast Conferences)

Major Repairs & Rehabilitation

Capital Outlay (Major Purchases and Upgrades)

Personnel

Finally, for discussion purposes, detailed station positions are listed for consideration. These, of course, would be included in annual budget proposals for funding consideration. The following is taken from the book cited earlier, *The Culture of American College Radio* (Sauls, 2000, p. 113-115):

PROFESSIONAL/ACADEMIC FULL-TIME

- *General Manager or Station Manager.* This individual is quite often the faculty advisor to the station, with station duties assigned in addition to academic (teaching) responsibilities. At some schools this person is a full-time staff member. It is the responsibility of the person to oversee the management and administration of the entire radio station. The manager has complete control over the station and maintains total and legal responsibility for its operation. All personnel, budgetary, and general programming decisions are under the auspices of the general manager/station manager.
- *Chief Engineer.* Usually this individual is a full-time staff member, possibly dividing his or her time with other duties within an academic department or unit. Recent rulings by the FCC may now have this position labeled as the Chief Operator, as delegated by the station manager. This person is responsible for all technical specifications and operations at the station, including studio and broadcast.

STUDENT POSITIONS (Some college radio stations, particularly NPR and commercial stations, fill a few of these positions with full-time personnel.)

- *Student Station Manager.* Oversees the day-to-day operation of the station. Supervises the entire student staff.
- *Program/Operations Director.* In lieu of the student Station Manager, the highest ranking student position. Oversee the entire day-to-day operation,

with more concentration on station programming; auditions and schedules all disc jockeys.

- *News Director.* Supervises all news operations within the station, including the auditioning and scheduling of newscasters and reporters. May oversee public affairs programming.
- *Sports Director.* Supervises all sports operations within the station, including the auditioning and scheduling of sportscasters and sports reporters. Also coordinates all remote sports broadcasts.
- *Public Affairs Director.* Working in conjunction with the News Director to assume responsibility for all public affairs production and programming. May also assist in the ascertainment of community leaders to determine programming in accordance with the quarterly issues/programs lists.
- *Music Director.* Assumes responsibility for all music played at the station. Maintains contact with music representatives. Coordinates giveaways, promotions, and live broadcasts with the Program Director and Promotions Director.
- *Traffic Director.* Works closely with the Program Director while maintaining the station program logs. Ensures the requirements are met concerning EAS, underwriting, and other legal obligations. May be responsible for ensuring that programs for broadcast are in the on-air studio in a timely fashion.

- *Production Director.* Assumes responsibility for all station production, in particular spot (short form :30 & :60) production. Works closely with the Program, News, Sports, and Public Affairs directors to ensure production quality.
- *Public Service Director.* Ensures that public service obligations are met through the airing of public service announcements. Works closely with the Program and Promotions Directors in coordinating station public service activities, particularly live remote events. In conjunction with the Production Director, prescribes the recorded/produced public service programming on the station.
- *Promotions Director.* Handles all station promotions. Works closely with the Program and Music Directors to coordinate both in-studio and remote station promotions. Works with the Station Manger, Program Director, and Sales Director to produce the station program guide for outside distribution.
- *Sales Director.* Seeks out, solicits, and services underwriting/supporting clientele. Works closely with the Station Manager and Program Director to ensure that legal and programming standards are met.
- *Special Programs Director(s).* Takes on tasks usually specific to a given formatting area (i.e., alternative, country, new-age, urban, etc.). Quite often coordinates programming within their area, including the auditioning and scheduling of special programs hosts.

Conclusion

With so many particulars and controlling factors contained in operating a media unit on a college or university campus, administrators are faced with the daunting task of trying to exactly figure out what their station is about. The focus of this paper was to present issues and introduce areas that would be of particular concern to school administrators as they attempt to understand their media outlet. This discussion centered on topics of utmost concern for the management and operation of the station itself and its relationship with the school. To that end, the areas ownership, location, structure and operation, technical issues, finances and personnel were chosen for deliberation and consideration.

The limitation of any discussion of this nature is that every possible area can not be addressed. But, by bringing forth pertinent points, operational avenues can be further investigated by administrations to help in their understanding of the station itself. Furthermore, it is through this investigation of these elementary but crucial points that the station will also function in a manner consistent with the desires of the schools itself. These attributes could be carried over in the operation and management of other electronic media outlets as well.

Finally, the framework in which this discussion was presented is that of a working tool. Both station and school administrations can view this manuscript as a prescriptive guide to foster the operation of their station.

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